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quick facts on...

Lake Okeechobee Program

OCTOBER 2006

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

Our Mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems, and water supply.

2006 Key Accomplishments

- **Launched the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery Plan**
- **Completed inventory of public lands for potential water storage options**
- **Completed site optimization and conceptual design for Nubbin Slough STA expansion**
- **Lykes Basinger Groves water storage pilot project operational in January**

The Lake Okeechobee Program is focused on the development and implementation of management activities that will allow the lake to support a greater diversity of native plants and animals while providing flood protection, water supply, navigation and recreation.

Lake Okeechobee is the "liquid heart" of South Florida's interconnected aquatic ecosystem. The lake provides a number of values and benefits to the state's population and environment, including water supply; flood protection; a sport and commercial fishery; and wildlife habitat.

The Lake Okeechobee Program is geared toward solving three major problems facing the lake and its watershed: (1) excessive nutrient loading; (2) extreme high and low water levels in the lake; and (3) exotic species. The Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan (LOPP) was completed in January 2004 and contains an implementation schedule to meet 140 metric tons phosphorus load by 2015, and elements of exotic species control, research and monitoring.

Since the completion of the LOPP, in response to water resource needs, legislative directives, and demands of Florida citizens, the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery (LOER) Plan has been developed to help restore the ecological health of Lake Okeechobee and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries.

Initial funding has been provided for a series of "fast-track" capital projects to improve water quality. In addition to construction, several innovative components – some not requiring large capital outlays – can also improve the condition of Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries. These include options for surface and below ground water storage, revisions to permit criteria, and revisions to the federal Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule.

Agency Strategic Priority

To restore the health of Lake Okeechobee

Program Goal

To improve the health of the Lake Okeechobee ecosystem by improving water quality, reducing or eliminating exotic species and better managing water levels



To date, more than 40 projects have been completed north of Lake Okeechobee to improve and protect Florida's "liquid heart." Approximately 21 additional projects are now under way under the multi-agency Lake Okeechobee & Estuary Recovery Plan (LOER), which includes five "fast-track" construction projects.



When all LOER projects are in place, more than 135 tons of phosphorus will be prevented from entering Lake Okeechobee. Too much phosphorus, an ingredient in fertilizer, is a pollutant to the Lake Okeechobee ecosystem. It often promotes the uncontrolled growth of algae and invasive vegetation, damaging the ecology of the lake.



An environmental scientist monitors water quality and other health indicators perimeters in Lake Okeechobee.

Strategies

- Implement water quality improvement projects to reduce phosphorus in stormwater runoff, including "fast-track" capital projects
- Control exotic species to maintenance levels and conduct research to improve treatment options
- Improve the performance of Lake Okeechobee's operating schedule to reduce damaging high water levels while preserving other project purposes
- Assess Lake Okeechobee's ecological condition and program progress on an annual basis
- Monitor influence of *Acceler8* on CERP Lake Okeechobee project schedule and implement contingencies to meet water quality targets and timelines if CERP schedules slip

Success Indicators

- Complete non-structural revisions to Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule by 2006
- Implement revised Environmental Resource Permit criteria for new development for the Kissimmee, Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie Estuary and Caloosahatchee Estuary basins by 2008
- Identify storage and/or disposal options by 2008
- Complete Lake Okeechobee "fast-track" projects by 2009
- Full implementation of the LOPP and the CERP Lake Okeechobee Watershed Projects by 2015
- Percentage reduction of phosphorus inputs to lake
- Percentage of time lake stage is in the favorable range for littoral zone and submerged aquatic plants
- Number of acres of exotic and nuisance species treated
- Number of acres of restored wetlands in the watershed



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 Lower West Coast
 239-338-2929 or 800-248-1201

Martin/St. Lucie
 772-223-2600 or 800-250-4100
 Miami-Dade
 305-377-7274 or 800-250-4300
 Okeechobee
 863-462-5260 or 800-250-4200
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